

Gear Up, Strap It On - Helmets Can Save Lives and Reduce Injuries

Spring is here and millions of Americans are heading outdoors to take part in their favorite sports activities. But gearing up for fun also means wearing the right gear. For CPSC, that means wearing a helmet each time you jump on a bike or skateboard, or put on your in-line skates.

At a press event at CPSC's headquarters, Chairman Hal Stratton released CPSC's new guide, "Which Helmet for Which Activity." This safety brochure is being released in conjunction with "Brain Injury Awareness Month." CPSC believes the guide will help consumers determine the best type of helmet for their activity and help to prevent head and brain injuries.

"Thousands of consumers could reduce the risk of serious head injury or death by wearing a helmet. It's important to wear the appropriate helmet for your sport," said Chairman Stratton.

Ice skating Olympic gold medalist and sports commentator Dick Button, a national spokesman for the Brain Injury Association of America, spoke about his brain injury due to a fall on the ice and strongly encouraged greater helmet use.

Not all helmets, however, are created equal. Different activities require different helmets, and there are helmets for every season's sports. Each type of helmet is designed to protect your head from the impact that can take place in the particular sport for which it is intended. In a collision or fall, a helmet absorbs most of the impact energy, instead of your head.

Wearing a bicycle helmet while biking, for example, can reduce your risk of head injury by 85 percent, and reduce the risk of brain injury by 88 percent, according to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

According to CPSC's 2004 estimates, bicyclists received about 151,000 head injuries that were treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms. Nearly 11,000 or 7 percent of those emergency room visits resulted in hospitalization.

Skateboarders visited hospital emergency rooms with about 18,000 head injuries, and approximately 760 or 4 percent were hospitalized. CPSC estimates horseback riders received about 14,000 emergency room-treated head injuries. Approximately 2,400 or 17 percent of those head injuries required hospitalization.

Many of these injuries could have been prevented through proper helmet usage. Bicycle helmets manufactured after 1999 must comply with the CPSC bicycle helmet mandatory safety standard. The standard also requires that chin straps be strong enough to keep the helmet on the head and in the proper position during a fall or collision. Other helmets are subject to other safety standards.

A proper fit is as important as wearing the correct helmet in helping prevent head injuries. A helmet should be both comfortable and snug. Be sure that it is level on your head, not tilted back on the top of the head or pulled too low over the forehead. It should not move in any direction when adjusted properly. Make sure the chin strap is securely buckled so the helmet doesn't move or fall off during a fall or collision.

CPSC's "Which Helmet for Which Activity" guide is a free publication and can be ordered by calling CPSC's Hotline at (800) 638-2772. An on-line version of the guide (pdf) can be found at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/349.pdf>